



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ORAL EXPRESSION: ITS PLACE IN THE CYCLE OF LEARNING

ARTHUR ANDREWS

Supervisor of Oral Expression, Grand Rapids, Michigan

It may easily be discerned that oral expression is being given greater emphasis in our high-school and college curricula. During the last two years a large number of textbooks have been brought forward which endeavor to state the problem and direct the effort in teaching the students to speak more plainly, fluently, and effectively. It is hard to understand why we have neglected this problem so long. We are giving vocational courses in mechanics and industrial arts and we supervise music in every grade of the public schools. While it will generally be conceded that special training in these fields is worth while, it must also be granted that it is more important that the child should have instruction in developing his ability to use the mother-tongue.

The need of such training is certainly apparent. It is contended that Americans have the most hideous voices in the world. Articulation is slovenly; the prevalence of speech defects is surprising; many advanced students cannot read intelligently, and the English used by many of the pupils in our high schools is a disgrace to the institution. Acknowledging these facts, we have made no concerted effort to attack the problem. Occasionally an ambitious teacher makes a list of common mistakes or drills the class upon a few mispronunciations that "get on her nerves"; but an intelligent, systematic method of dealing with these mistakes is yet to be devised. As a member of a school board in the Middle West is reported to have said "the English language is the only thing in the curriculum that all of us will have to use, and yet it appears to be the only thing that we are not trying to emphasize."

The failure of the school to give greater attention to the problems of oral expression is partially explained by the fact that many feel that emphasis in this direction is likely to lead to loose talking and artificiality. This is a point that must be given consideration.

Stress placed upon expression may give rise to the idea that expression is an end in itself instead of a means to an end. We take it for granted that all feel that we should talk for a purpose and that few are interested in making an exhibition or show of oratory. If emphasis placed on oral work is going to develop mere fluency or loose talking, the less we have of it the better. It is important that the student should enunciate words plainly and that his voice should be clear and pleasant, but it is more important that he should have something to say. The writer has in mind students who have been complimented upon their ability to speak readily and who talk on every occasion, whether they have anything to contribute or not. Apparently they like the sound of their own voices and seem to think they are creating an impression because they can make a noise. They resemble a certain voluble young man of whose work the instructor caustically remarked, "He tries to do it all with his mouth." It is to be hoped that training in oral expression will not suggest that we can do it all with our mouths.

Stress placed upon the forms of expression, if skilfully directed, will bring good results, but it must be remembered that voluntary attention given to details of pronunciation, sentence structure, and the like takes just so much from the creative processes of the intellect. Too much emphasis in this direction may be a positive hindrance to good thinking. Obviously the more quickly we can deal with these problems the better. The most important point to be noticed in this connection is that real growth in expression will generally be best achieved by an indirect method. Let the child feel that he has a message to deliver instead of taking pride in the fact that he is going to make a speech. Good expression is best stimulated by giving the child something vital to say. This does not mean that no attention should be given to the forms of expression, but rather that the emphasis should be put on the content.

Appreciating that oral expression may develop verboseness and that attacking the problem of expression directly often gives unsatisfactory results, many are inclined to give their time to what they term "impression" work, letting expression take care of itself. After all, the object of the teacher is to teach, is the contention,

and we have not time to bother about expression. The answer to this argument is that there can be no impression without expression. Expression is a means of clarifying thought, of giving definiteness to our ideas—a part of real learning. There can be no real impression without correlative expression.

It appears that the value of expression in the learning process has not been sufficiently emphasized. It is to be hoped that attention given to expression will improve speech habits, and it is to be confidently expected that it will assist in teaching students to think more clearly and precisely.

There can be little question as to the relation of impression and expression. They constitute complementary parts of the same process. We have never really learned anything till we have expressed it. Says Dr. Charles Cooley:

The impulse to communicate is not so much a result of thought as it is an inseparable part of it. They are like the root and the branch—two phases of a common growth—so that the death of one presently involves the death of the other. . . . Every thought involves an active impulse as a part of its very nature, and this impulse takes the shape of a need to talk. To define and vivify thought we need to impart it to others.¹

The thinking process has not been completed till there has been some form of expression. Dr. Stephen Colvin, of the University of Illinois, makes the point in the following language: "Every completed experience involves an adjustment. The sensory motor arc must be traversed. . . . In the last analysis there must be some form of self-expression on the part of the child if any real learning is to take place."² Emerson has said: "I am but one half myself. The other half is my expression." The point is further expounded by President Bryan, of Colgate:

An individual is capable of three things: He can be impressed; he can reflect, reorganize, reconstruct; he can express. The mental cycle is sensation, organization, and expression. . . . Our expression of an idea tends to define and clarify it, and at the same time *determines more or less the direction and strength of the ideas that follow*. A fact never to be forgotten is that the life to be expressed is affected by expression just as truly as the expression is affected by the life to be expressed.³

¹ *Human Nature and the Social Order*.

² *The Learning Process*.

³ *The Basis of Practical Teaching*.

The practical application of all this is easily appreciated. It is a matter of common experience to have the most vague and general notions cleared up by expression. Every teacher knows what it is to come before a class and have ideas assume definite form in the act of expression. Young teachers insist that they learn more than the students, and, as it is they who have the opportunity of indulging in expression, their statement is true. It has been said that we talk ourselves clear, and a great many people never do get clear on some subjects till they talk themselves clear. Giving attention to oral expression is not to be considered as an added burden for the teachers, but as a means of making them more efficient as teachers. The youthful pedagogue spends a month giving the most interesting and lucid explanations, only to discover that the ignorance of the class is inexplicable. "The most common fault of teachers," says President Bryan, "is that they explain too much, they recite too much, they talk too much." On visiting a grammar-grade classroom and finding the teacher apparently lecturing, stopping occasionally to ask a leading question, one wonders if the teacher has appreciated that there is no vital impression without correlative expression.

One of the facts that has been observed is the close relationship between imperfect expression and slovenly thought processes. In many individual cases it has become apparent to the writer that the student spoke in a slovenly, faltering manner because he had no confidence in his own ability to think. He had not acquired the habit of vigorously completing the cycle of learning. One cannot help feeling that if the student had been given an opportunity to talk himself clear on the most simple problems, if he had expressed himself with confidence on the most elementary fact, he would have started a fundamental intellectual growth. His attitude toward the second problem was largely influenced by the initial failure. As already suggested, expression determines more or less the direction and strength of the ideas that follow.

The opportunity for oral expression is a great stimulus to careful thinking. Often we fail to organize the material; our concepts are vague; the process is not completed. When called upon to express ourselves, we are ashamed of our failure and launch a

more vigorous effort to fit the new material into our experience. Expression reacts as a stimulus to the imagination, the instrument of reality. Since it has been made plain that creative imagination has to do with the real things of life rather than with the fanciful, the importance of this is being appreciated. Free expression is sure to be accompanied by creative imagination, and it is only by catching a "vision of realities that cannot be exhibited under existing conditions"¹ that we may gather our ideals, our incentives to action. It is a common experience to approach an oral report with diffidence, then to become interested to the point of fascination, and finally to see various profitable lines of action that have never entered the mind before. This fact was impressed upon me by an oral report I gave in the eighth grade. The teacher seemed somewhat surprised that I could give so many of the details of the battle of Gettysburg. After school she asked me to take five or ten minutes on Friday afternoon to discuss the battle before the class. I can recall the enthusiasm with which the preparation was made for the recitation. A large blackboard was covered with a map of the battleground. The facts were discussed at home, and material from many sources was organized and woven into the narrative. The exact location of the armies was made plain; reasons were given why Lee was willing to force a battle even from an unfavorable position; Pickett's charge was described in detail; and the recitation closed with a description of Lee's masterful retreat. These facts stand out in perfect clearness today. The cycle of learning had been completed. Expression had clarified thought and crystallized it until the ideas were never to be forgotten. I can recall a course in American literature where the instructor did all the talking, and now it would be impossible for me to give two facts that were learned in the entire course.

Something should also be said of the importance of auditory imagery. There are a great many points of contention in this field, but it will be granted by all that a great many people think in auditory images. It is also probable that the auditory images created by the student's own voice will make a deeper impression than those of another voice. Interpretation and appreciation of

¹ Royce, *Outlines of Psychology*.

literature depend largely upon auditory images. In poetry the auditory images play a much more important part than the visual. Educators are generally recognizing this fact, and as a result there is the great demand for English teachers who can read and speak. Teaching the appreciation of most literature is practically impossible without this ability. Something might also be said in regard to the application of the principles of kinaesthetic education to oral expression. However, the facts in regard to this matter are rather uncertain, or, at least, their significance has not been carefully worked out.

The suggestion of Professor Judd affords at least one practical method of direct introduction of opportunity for expression. He insists that oral reading should not be emphasized beyond the fifth grade. The contention is full of meaning. Reading-classes above the fifth grade are little more than perfunctory drill. The point of the matter is that students have learned to grasp the thought from the printed page much faster than they can possibly read the words orally. The classes pay little attention, and often students are criticized by the teacher for getting ahead of the place held by the one attempting to do oral reading. The sensible criticism of all this is that it is not reading at all. The object of instruction in reading is to give the child the key, the instrument by which he may gain admittance to the storehouses of intellectual treasure. We are not so much interested in this reading drill as we are that the child should gain the ability to appreciate the characters of Dickens, the philosophy of Browning, or, most important of all, that he should be able to gain those facts from the printed page that will make it possible for him to earn a better livelihood. The trouble is that the reading drill has really little to do with life. Put into the student's hands an abundance of reading-material. Let him read to gather his facts and come before his classmates to tell of the riches he has found. This will enable him to complete thoroughly the learning process, and will make possible the correlation of reading and real learning. The facts acquired in this way are never to be forgotten. This will give the student drill in oral expression, giving him practice in oral narrative, argument, and exposition. It will give the student practice in facing a group of

individuals and establish the habit of reading for thought-content which he will carry with him into the after-years to enrich and ennoble his life. It must not be understood that oral reading beyond the fifth grade is to be done away with entirely. Rather we should have less of it, and it should be directed in a more efficient way. Students should certainly be required to read aloud, and, more than this, the teacher should read regularly to the class. We must remember that students acquire auditory images. Clear enunciation and correct pronunciation and even the quality of the voice are acquired by the student through auditory images. But, regardless of the value of this work, the point to be made here is that reading and expression should go together as a means of learning.

The trend of education in putting stress on oral expression is one to be defended on purely pedagogical principles. It will gather power as it proceeds. Its defense is to be based on the simplest of common-sense facts. We know, upon good authority, that 95 per cent of the English used in life is oral. Every business man knows that the student does not write when he leaves school—he talks. We want the personal interview when we attempt to make a sale; we talk to committees and heads of departments; we dictate letters. The ability to make a pointed speech is desired by every live man in the business world.

From the pedagogical standpoint the object of this paper has been to show that oral expression is not a “fringe or a frill or a decoration,” but a means of giving order and stability to our ideas. It is a means of completing the learning process. The time is surely coming when we shall appreciate the significance of these facts. We shall give expert attention to oral reading; develop a system to correct mistakes in English; pay as much attention to the speaking voice as we do to penmanship. There will be a correlation of expression with every subject in the curriculum. The work will pervade every grade and make education more efficient and more practical. Students will be more thoroughly prepared, will possess more confidence in their own ability, and will be able to think and talk on their feet. At present it is hardly possible to appreciate the scope of the work.